

# Facts about Nicotine Replacement Therapy and Smoking

## What is nicotine?

Nicotine is the ingredient in cigarettes that causes people to become addicted to smoking. When you smoke, the nicotine inhaled from a cigarette reaches your brain in 7 to 10 seconds making it extremely addictive.

## Is nicotine harmful?

Nicotine is not known to cause cancer, lung disease or heart disease. It is the over 4,000 harmful chemicals found in cigarette smoke that cause lung, heart disease and cancer.

## What is Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)?

NRT refers to the nicotine patch, gum, inhaler and lozenge. NRT has been approved by Health Canada as an effective medication for helping people to quit smoking as it helps to reduce nicotine withdrawal symptoms. NRT is safe for smokers. It provides a “clean” form of nicotine without the other dangerous chemicals found in cigarettes.

## Could I get addicted to NRT?

There is very little risk of becoming addicted to NRT. It is unheard of with the patch, but some users of the gum have used it for years to stay off cigarettes. The nicotine from NRT is absorbed into your body much more slowly and in lower doses than from cigarettes. It does not contain the harmful chemicals that are in cigarettes.

## Are stop smoking medications effective in helping people quit?

Yes, Health Canada has approved three types of medications for helping people to quit smoking: NRT, Bupropion (Zyban) and Varenicline (Champix). If used properly, these medications can double to quadruple the quit rates.

## Is it true that smoking while using NRT causes heart attacks?

No. NRT has not been associated with any increase in cardiac events (heart attack, stroke). People who smoke are already at a high risk of heart disease; therefore, the best way to reduce risk of heart disease is to quit smoking completely.

## What if I already have heart disease?

If you have heart disease, it is much more dangerous to continue smoking than to use NRT. NRT can be safely used as a quit smoking medication for people with stable heart conditions. Always check with your doctor before using any medications; this includes NRT, prescription or over the counter drugs. Other stop smoking medications such as Bupropion or Varenicline can also be used in such situations.



## Is it safe for pregnant women to use NRT?

Lifestyle (avoiding people, places and things that trigger smoking) and behaviour changes (delaying and distracting techniques) are recommended first before considering NRT. If you are unable to quit, try NRT after the first trimester (3 months). If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, always check with your doctor before using any medications; this includes NRT, prescription or over the counter drugs.

Using NRT during pregnancy is safer than smoking cigarettes. The safety of Bupropion and Varenicline in pregnancy is unknown. For information about the risk or safety of prescription and over the counter drugs during pregnancy, contact Motherisk's Home Line at 416-813-6780.

## Can someone under the age of 18 use NRT?

Yes. Most people start smoking before they are 18 years old and are already getting nicotine from cigarettes. Using nicotine replacement therapy is much safer than smoking. There is no evidence that NRT is harmful to young smokers.

## How do I know what dose or type of NRT is right for me?

The amount or type of NRT needed to increase a person's chances of quitting smoking will be different from one person to the next. The doses listed on the side of the box are a guideline, but it takes time to learn the best way of using NRT to help you quit. It is important to monitor and be in control of your withdrawal symptoms.

## Is it okay to use more than one NRT at the same time?

For some people, using more than one type of NRT (nicotine patch, gum, inhaler or lozenge) at a time can be more effective than using only one of these methods alone. Always check with your doctor before using any medications; this includes NRT, prescription or over the counter drugs. Combination NRT (16mg patch with 2mg gum) has been approved for general sale in Canada without the need for a prescription.

## If I am taking Bupropion (Zyban) to help me quit smoking, is it safe for me to also use NRT?

Bupropion (Zyban) is another quit smoking medication approved by Health Canada. Some studies show that using NRT in addition to Bupropion (Zyban) increases a person's chances of quitting.

## How long can I use NRT?

NRT should be used as long as needed to quit smoking and to stay quit. Some people may need to continue using NRT for years. Using NRT for long periods of time is considered safer than smoking.

## I'm not ready to quit. Can I use NRT to help me cut down on my smoking?

Yes. If you are not ready to quit but want to cut down on how much you smoke, NRT (gum, patch, lozenge or inhaler) can be used to reduce the amount you smoke. NRT gum has been approved for use over a 1 year period to reduce smoking in an effort to quit.

Please consult your doctor or health care practitioner  
before starting any new medication.

Smokers' Helpline has trained quit specialists who can help you quit smoking. For free and confidential help, call 1-877-513-5333 or visit [smokershelpline.ca](http://smokershelpline.ca).

Adapted with permission from CAMH, TEACH™ Myths and Facts of Nicotine Replacement Therapies and the Ontario Medical Association position paper Rethinking Stop-Smoking Medications: treatment Myths and Medical Realities.